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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DUSHANBE 001433

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: STATE COMMITTEE FOR NATIONAL SECURITY DEFENDS CIVILIZATION

REF: (A) DUSHANBE 617 AND LATER (TAVILDARA SITREPS), (B) DUSHANBE 347 (LAW ON RELIGION)

CLASSIFIED BY: Kenneth Gross, Ambassador, Exec, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (c), (d)

11. (C) Summary: In a 75 minute meeting on December 11, State Committee for National Security (GKNB) Deputy Chairman for Counterterrorism General Abdullo Sadulloevich Nazarov described the terrorist threats facing Tajikistan, argued that authoritarian measures were necessary to defend civilization against destructive radicalism, and insisted that the new law on religion would be used only against groups which threatened state security. End Summary.

12. (C) PolEcon Chief called on General Nazarov to get his views in advance of drafting this year's Terrorism Report. Nazarov expressed some surprise that such a report was available on the State Department website and took a few minutes to carefully read the 2008 report, translated into Russian. Nazarov commented that the 2008 report was largely accurate, but he could not fully agree with its description of Tajikistan's border security forces.

13. (C) Nazarov first commented that the GKNB highly valued assistance from the United States and coalition partners, and that such assistance was important to fight terrorist groups. He said that the lack of motivation among border guards cited in the 2008 report in fact had existed for some time, including when Russian forces manned the border. He said that Tajik and Russian forces had sometimes accused each other of allowing violations of the border to take place. However, after the GKNB took over the border guards in 2005 it had cleaned up the border guards, firing those who were involved in illegal activities, and greatly increased the organization's effectiveness. Nazarov claimed the border guards had been able to arrest almost all major drug barons, Afghan and Tajik.

14. (C) Nazarov noted the GKNB and other services were also fighting Al Qaida and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) members who tried to infiltrate Tajikistan. He described how in Spring and Summer 2009 in Tavildara, Tajik security forces killed or drove away members of international terrorist groups, including ethnic Koreans, Tatars, Dagestanis, and Chechens. [Note: The Ministry of Interior stated to the media on August 5, 2009, that the Interior Ministry and State Committee for National Security finished an anti-terror operation in the country's southeast during which 11 militants were killed. Embassy understands from its sources that the combat operations were mainly carried out by Ministry of Interior OMON forces.] Nazarov said that Tajik security forces were operating to the limit of their abilities, but needed better technology,

transport, communications, and arms, and the United States could help in these areas.

15. (C) Nazarov continued that the Tavildara events showed the relative effectiveness of Tajik security services, despite scarce resources. About a dozen Russian citizens from Saint Petersburg and Tyumen had flown to Tajikistan, crossing Russian security points despite being on wanted lists in Russia. Tajik security forces arrested 5-6 of the group in Dushanbe, and destroyed the others in Tavildara. Then IMU leader Tohir Yuldashev sent five IMU members to assist the militants in Tavildara, but Tajik security caught this group in Darvaz. This IMU group also planned to set bombs near the perimeter of the U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe to create panic in Dushanbe (Nazarov noted in passing that the embassy compound itself was too well defended for an attack). Security forces had found the explosives the group planned to use for this attack. The group also planned to conduct reconnaissance for an attack against the Nizhny Pyanj bridge.

MANIPULATIONS

16. (C) PolEcon Chief asked whether the threat posed by terrorist organizations to Tajikistan increased in the past year. Nazarov avoided a direct answer. He said that Al Qaida, the IMU, and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) were active in many countries, including Tajikistan, but with the help of other countries "we can eliminate them." He gave the example of a visit to Berlin in June 2009, where he had revealed to the Germans the existence of an IMU cell in Germany.

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17. (C) "We would have destroyed them long ago" Nazarov said, if other countries didn't manipulate terrorist groups for "geopolitical goals." For instance, in Pakistan Osama Bin Laden wasn't an invisible man, and many knew his whereabouts in North Waziristan, but whenever security forces attempted a raid on his hideouts, the enemy received warning of their approach from sources in the security forces.

18. (C) Russian peacekeeping forces in Tajikistan in 2001-2002 had helped terrorist groups transit Tajik territory into Uzbekistan to destabilize that country. "Who gave them arms and equipment?" Nazarov rhetorically asked. He said that at Shanghai Cooperation Organization meetings Tajik representatives asked the Russians how known terrorists kept getting through Domodedovo and Sheremetovo airports. Nazarov did not say what response the Tajiks received.

THE DEVIL IS NOT SO TERRIBLE

19. (C) Nazarov complained of media exaggerations about terrorism, repeating the old saying "the devil is never as terrible as he's described." If 12 men infiltrated Tavildara, in the press it became 200-300 men, Nazarov said. Mass media gave terrorists free advertising, and made them look more important than they were. Nazarov said "we must stop this" to be able to fight terrorists more effectively.

¶10. (C) Turning to the question of rising religious radicalism in Tajikistan, Nazarov said radicals trained in Pakistan were trying to infiltrate Tajikistan and that they and Afghan terrorists hoped to exploit radical sentiment in Tajikistan. This radicalism posed a threat to society and the state. So the Supreme Court's ban on Salafism, the Jamaat e Tabligh, and Hizb-ut-Tahrir aimed at eliminating their influence in society. He noted that Jamaat e Tabligh members claimed they were only a missionary organization, but during the events in Tavildara some Tabligh members revealed their true colors by trying to go join the militants. The human rights community criticized Tajikistan for being harsh with the Jamaat e Tabligh and other groups, "but if we don't act harshly, Tajikistan will be like Kashmir."

¶11. (C) Asked whether the new law on religion helped or hindered in fighting terrorism, Nazarov said the law applied to a specific situation. "We were harshly criticized for it," for instance for the article forbidding children to attend mosques. "But look at the Iranian revolution," Nazarov said. Mosques brought people together and then into the streets. "Tajikistan isn't America" he continued, and the new law provided some limits on the influence of religious leaders. Children need secular education, then later they could attend mosques, Nazarov argued. He said that Imams trained abroad called for "death to America" in their sermons, and that this practice must stop or "Tajikistan could be a little Iran." So the Government must "tighten the screws" on radical groups to preserve civilization in Tajikistan.

¶12. (C) Might the law backfire, by inspiring more radicalism, especially in a time of declining economic fortunes and increasing difficulties in providing basic services such as education and health care? Nazarov thought not. The law was directed at particular groups, not society in general, and repressing of religious groups was a temporary measure until the state was firmly established. And he took exception to PolEcon Chief's reference to economic and social services problems, saying forcefully that the Government had "done much for the people since independence" including bringing roads, more electricity, and schools to Tajiks.

COMMENT - A TRUE BELIEVER, BUT PERHAPS NOT IN RUSSIA

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¶13. (C) Nazarov spoke quickly, in a friendly manner, and seemed genuinely pleased to have a U.S. diplomat seek his views. He came across as a true believer in the need for tough measures to control religion, and in the view that Islam is opposed to civilization. His claims that the GKNB had cleaned up the border guards and helped arrest major drug barons was self-serving propaganda. More notable were his repeated critical references to Russia as a state which manipulated terrorist groups to its own ends. End Comment.
GROSS